DISTRO**HOPPER**

We've tapped GCHQ's communications to find out what's going on in distro land.

Neon 5

Show off Plasma Next.

Neon 5 is a live Linux that's been created to show off the early versions of Plasma Next, the upcoming desktop of KDE. Because of this, it's utterly useless as a general-purpose OS. It's unstable and devoid of pretty essential software (such as a web browser). It's built on Ubuntu Trusty, so the software is available – it's just that there's very little installed by default. This minimalism is, of course, by design. Neon 5 has only one purpose: to show off Plasma Next.

Plasma Next is still in Beta, so we can't say for sure exactly what it will be like, but it is clear what direction the project's moving in from a design point of view. It's sleeker, flatter and more modern than previous versions, and these are all things that we approve of.

Behind the scenes, there's been major work to use Qt 5, which brings with it major
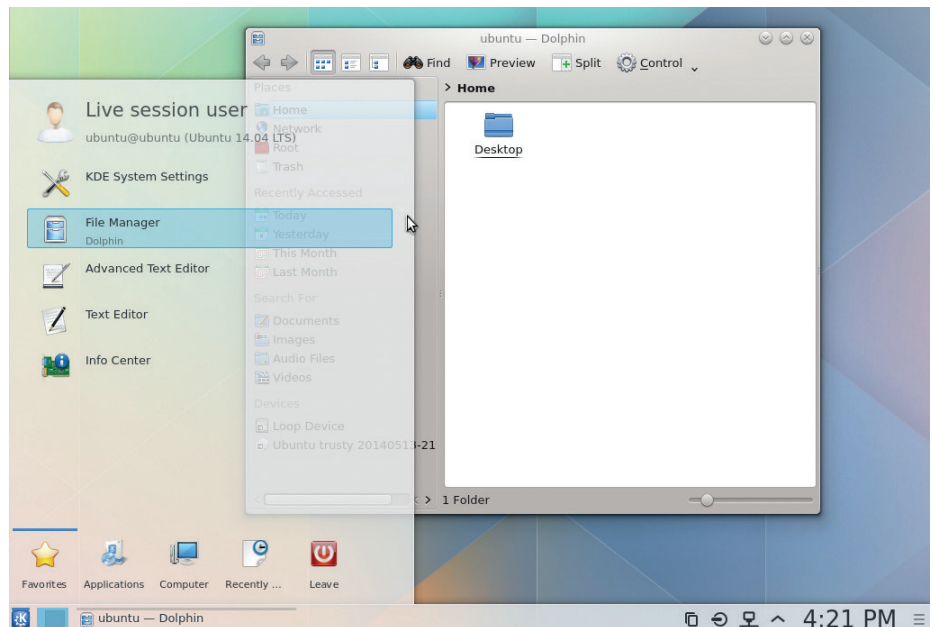
There's still some work to do, so expect the final version of Plasma Next to look a little different.

improvements in Qt Quick, one of which is in the scenegraph rendering, which now runs much better in OpenGL. This should result in performance improvements, but there's still tweaking to do before the speedup is fully realised. It's still early days for Plasma Next, but here at Linux Voice, we're cautiously optimistic for the future.
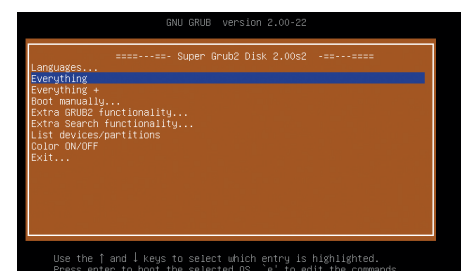
Super Grub2 Disk 2.0

Boot your borked system automagically.

Super Grub2 Disk is one of those things that you may never need, but on rare occasions, it can really get you out of a tight spot. It isn't a Linux distro, but a live disc to help you boot other distros. If you've managed to knacker your boot sector or EFI partition, you could be left with an unbootable computer. A regular live CD should still be able to start, but it may not

have all the tools you need to find and fix the problem. In steps Super Grub2 Disk (it's not the snappiest of names, but at least it's descriptive). It contains all sorts of boot wizardry to seek out and boot whatever operating systems are present on your machine. Once the existing OS is booted, you should be able to use the system's tools to repair the boot system.

New in version two is the ability to work on EFI systems (as long as secure boot isn't being used) as well as a new option to search additional forms of media such as LUKS and USB. Prior to version 2.0, there hadn't been a

We hope you'll never need it, but it's good to know that Super Grub2 Disk is there if you do.

stable release in three years, so it's good to see the project's still going. It's made by the same people as Rescatux (a Linux distro built to help fix or recover data from broken systems), which also hasn't seen a stable release in quite some time. Super Grub2 Disk 2.0, we're promised, is a precursor to a new version of Rescatux, so we have our fingers crossed.

> **"It contains all sorts of wizardry to seek out and boot whatever operating systems are present."**

Mint 17

Stability is a feature.

Perhaps we're a little odd, but one of the most interesting things about Mint for us is the insight it gives us into the differences between GTK 2 and GTK 3. Its two flagship desktop environments (Mate and Cinnamon) are very similar in almost every way except that they use different versions of the toolkit. Mate is a fork of Gnome 2 (and therefore uses the older GTK 2) while Cinnamon is a Gnome 2 lookalike built in GTK 3.

This toolkits aside, the two are really very similar. They both follow the traditional desktop paradigm with an applications menu in the bottom left, and a panel along the bottom – a tried and tested setup that's been a staple for almost 20 years.

Both versions are themed very similarly, so while most people probably have a slight preference for one over the other, it's unlikely to be strong (we mildly prefer the look of Cinnamon, but could easily understand people feeling the other way).

In our test the Mate versions started just under a second faster at 21 seconds. The Cinnamon desktop proved a little less memory hungry and gobbled up about 10%
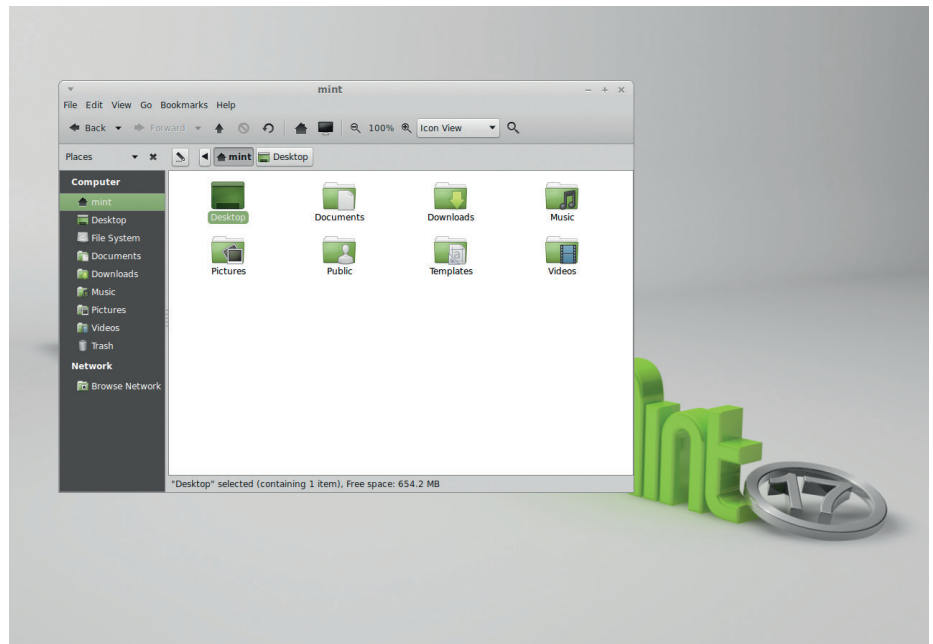
Bugs are fixed, packages are updated, but all the important stuff in Mint stays the same.

less memory than the Mate version. By far the biggest difference is that Cinnamon (and GTK 3) is designed to take advantage of hardware graphics acceleration. This means that if you have some form of graphics acceleration then it should run wonderfully smoothly, but if you don't, it runs terribly and even simple tasks can max out your CPU.

From Mint 17 onwards, there will only be a

new version of Mint every two years (it was previously every six months), though the team will make sure that major app updates get back-ported. This should make it easier for the developers as there'll be fewer versions to maintain, and better for users, as they'll get the latest software without having to upgrade their whole system.

Turn to **p48** for our full review of Mint 17.

Tails Keep your private communications private

There are loads of privacy and anonymity tools on Linux, but they are surprisingly hard to set up right, and unless they're set up correctly, they may not be giving you as much privacy or anonymity as you think they are. Fortunately, there's a solution: The Amnesiac Incognito Live System (or Tails). This is a live distro that does exactly what it claims to. It doesn't hold onto any information (Amnesiac), it keeps you anonymous (Incognito), and it's a live system. All you have to do is boot it up, and you have a properly set up private system. It's sufficient for Edward Snowden and his allies.

The project's just hit version 1 but this version number doesn't do justice to the distro's long and illustrious history already. It's not known how many journalists, whistle blowers and other free speech activists Tails has helped protect, but we strongly suspect that it's far more than this version number would suggest.

The project was once famous for having a properly configured Tor browser, but it now has much more as well. You can create encrypted volumes to keep data securely on a USB stick, use PGP email, browse the I2P network, use instant messaging, anonymise your metadata and do all the other tasks a journalist on the run from the NSA might need to do.
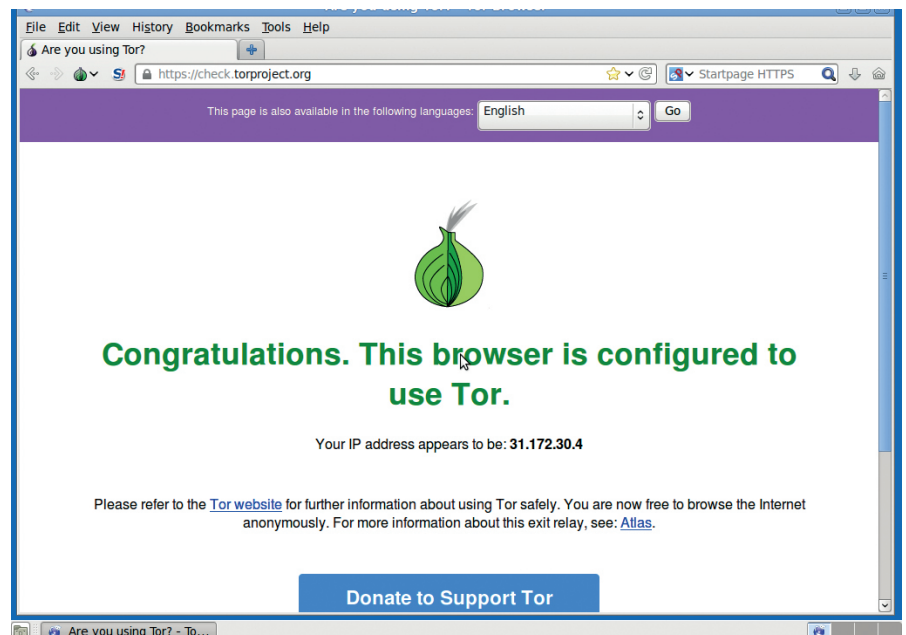
Tails won't save you from yourself, so the developers have put together guidance on the potential pitfalls at **https://tails.boum.org/doc/about/warning/index.en.html**.